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THE AGE

National Victoria Racism

Racist graffiti daubed on Hindu temple, Asian restaurants in Melbourne's east

Alexander Darling

July 23, 2025 — 6.15pm

Racist graffiti has been smeared on the front of two Asian-operated restaurants and a Hindu temple in Melbourne's east.

A Chinese restaurant, a Thai restaurant and the Shree Swaminarayan temple, all in the outer suburb of Boronia, were discovered defaced with hateful slurs on Monday morning.

Graham Tran, owner of Kingsland Chinese restaurant. JASON SOUTH

The restaurants were vandalised in red paint with the words “go home”, along with offensive language.

Police say racist graffiti was also spray-painted on the front of a healing centre on the Mountain Highway that night. They believe the four incidents are linked.
“An investigation into the incident is under way,” police said in a statement. “There is absolutely no place at all in our society for hate-based and racist behaviour.”

The graffiti on Kingsland's Boronia premises.

Graham and Elly Tran own Chinese restaurant Kingsland, which has been a fixture on Boronia Road since 1991. Graham grew up in the restaurant, which his parents started and he later took over. He said he had never before seen racist vandalism during his time in Boronia.

"Getting it plastered onto the wall of my business hurts a lot," he said. "I grew up [spending] more time in the restaurant than I did at home."

He discovered the graffiti on Monday when his six-year-old son was in the car with him.

"I just pulled up in front [of the restaurant] and my heart just dropped. I was like, 'Wow, I can't believe it's actually happened.' My son goes with me to the restaurant all the time, so knows that's not to be there … he has just started reading, so he can read 'home' and 'yellow', but he didn't understand what that last word was.

The same words were graffitied on nearby Charles King dumpling restaurant.

“That was probably the hardest thing for me, having to explain it to him … I just told him it was dirty graffiti. That’s all I could say to him.”

Graham said his nine-year-old daughter had been picking up what had happened by being online.

He has since cleaned off the paint and shared images of the vandalism on social media. He said he had been overwhelmed by the support from the community.
“It’s actually been great, the amount of customers, family and friends that have been messaging us. I’ve never really made a big deal out of this in the past. They have been encouraging us to continue with our head high.”

Elly said: “We’ve had a lot of solidarity from the community.

“People are now saying, ‘I will come to support your restaurant’ and ‘now we’ve got our dinner sorted for Saturday’ … We had someone who drove over an hour to come and eat.”

Police are also investigating vandalism that took place earlier this month when stencils were used to spray-paint offensive images at several restaurants and the Melbourne Holocaust Museum in Elsternwick, and on pillars at an intersection in Caulfield East.

On the same weekend, homophobic graffiti was spray-painted at venues in Abbotsford.

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Alexander Darling is a breaking news reporter at The Age. Connect via email.

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ABC News has a fresh look

We've made it easier to find the stories that matter to you with a new homepage, personalised sections and more.

Asian-Australians share their experience of racism during the coronavirus pandemic

ABC Everyday / By Kate Tran and Anh Huynh, as told to Farz Edraki

Race

Sun 12 Jul 2020 at 8:19pm

I was at a sport store with my boyfriend in Melbourne when it happened.

He was at the checkout; I was dawdling through the aisles.

At first, I thought I'd misheard.

"Why are they letting Asians here now?"

A couple, maybe in their 40s, were standing not far from me when they said it.

One of them then walked over to my boyfriend, who is fair-skinned, and said: "You've already got yellow fever, now you're going to get coronavirus too."

From their body language, their message was clear: they didn't want me there.

Part of me wanted to say something; the other part wanted to cry.

I ran out [of the store] and my hands were still shaking as I tried to keep my composure. My boyfriend rushed up and told me not to worry, to forget about it.

This happened in March. I'm still replaying the events of that day in my head.

'It's been difficult to leave the house'

I haven't gone back to the shopping centre.

I haven't had to: it's in Melbourne's northern suburbs, far from us. Easy to avoid.

If I'm honest, it's been difficult to socialise and leave the house.

There was anxiety around that anyway, because of the pandemic — and after that day in the shopping centre, it only got worse.

It wasn't the first time someone's said something racist. But it was the most overt.

I've lived in Australia for most of my adult life. I was born in Vietnam, grew up in Singapore, and moved to Australia when I was nine.

Over time, it's the throwaway comments that stay with you.

"Whoa, you have really big eyes for an Asian."

"You're really attractive for an Asian."

"Your English is really good."

When I've confronted people in the past, they've brushed it off. Told me I'm overreacting.

"I've made that joke to Asians before and no-one's had an issue," some people say.

Being open about my experiences with my friends has helped me feel less isolated. It's hard to process things in the moment, but talking helps.

'People are realising we have a problem in Australia'

It's been difficult trying to get my boyfriend to understand.

He tries to educate himself by reading through online forums on 'how to help your girlfriend in a biracial relationship'.

He asks me: "It's just a stranger, why do you care so much?" But it's not that simple.

I just want him to listen. To acknowledge: "OK I'm in a place where I will never understand what it's like to feel this discrimination."

I think a lot of Asian people don't like to speak up. In my own family, we're taught to mind our business.

Even when I told them about what happened in the store, my grandma was understanding but the rest of my family said: "Why do you care? Just move on."

I think that's how they've trained themselves to deal with it: to protect themselves from feeling vulnerable, because it's a sign of weakness.

I wish there were more conversations around race in my family. My grandma's on Facebook (she's young!) and so she's starting to understand it more because of the exposure.

It's good to see people are advocating for equality for all races.

People are starting to realise we have a problem in Australia.

— **Kate Tran, 21, Melbourne**

The "third ear" refers to listening for the deeper layers of meaning in order to glean what has not been said outright, such as covert racist remarks. *(ABC Everyday: Nathan Nankervis)*

We were walking in a botanical track in the Dandenong Ranges: me, my boyfriend, and his parents.

I'm Vietnamese-Australian and his family's Chinese-Malaysian-Australian.

It was a sunny, brisk day: April. We were looking at wild mushrooms when a group of teenagers walked near us.

"I hear there's toilet paper on the side of the track."

Laughter. They overtook us on the trail.

It took a while for the comment to register.

Did they really just say that? Did it mean what I think it meant?

Later, I kept thinking: "I should have said something."

But in the moment, I froze.

I don't feel safe anymore

If you're a person of colour, you develop a 'third ear' for times like these.

I heard that term for the first time recently, but it sums up how I feel: a part of you is always questioning the hidden meaning behind what people say.

That day in the botanic gardens, my third ear was going: "Was that a thing?"

My boyfriend and I have both become targets of racial abuse since the pandemic took hold in Australia.

He was walking in our neighbourhood when five teenage boys started shouting racist abuse at him.

He had to walk past them, and as he did, one of the guys ran up to him and started fake boxing in front of him, egging him on to fight.

My boyfriend just ignored him and kept walking.

There was another day when I parked in front of our house.

A group of kids came over. Our neighbours' kids.

I heard someone say, "Watch out, it's the corona."

One of the kids, probably not older than 13, asked me: "Do you have coronavirus?"

I was taken aback.

"Yes," I said sarcastically. I was tired.

"Are you serious?" he said, and when I assured him I wasn't, he responded with, "Can you go back to your country?"

I felt sorry for him. After all, he's just a kid.

But I can't help but feel there's nowhere safe for us anymore.

Our homes aren't safe. Our neighbourhood isn't safe. Going for a walk isn't safe.

'If people talk about it more it might help'

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- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- Headspace on 1800 650 890
- QLife on 1800 184 527
- ReachOut Australia

These days, when my boyfriend and I go to the supermarket, we plan it out.

Not just our shopping list.

We plan for what we'll do if someone makes another racist comment.

It became a coping mechanism, especially right after what happened in the Dandenong Ranges.

We thought, "If someone says something, we'll immediately say something back. We have to say something back."

I wish people realised the impact even small statements have.

I feel like sometimes the small things are just as traumatic as the big, obvious things. They're smaller but there's more of them. It becomes a snowball effect.

It's almost as bad because it's so much more prominent. The small things are everyday people who might not even realise the impact of what they say.

The current conversations around race are encouraging.

Maybe if people talk about it more, it might help people like me.

— Anh Huynh, 28, Melbourne

Posted Sun 12 Jul 2020 at 8:19pm

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‘You become a target’: research shows why many people who experience racism don’t report it

Published: July 13, 2025 4:07pm EDT

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https://theconversation.com/you-become-a-target-research-shows-why-many-people-who-experience-racism-dont-report-it-260092

The way racism manifests itself may have changed over time, but it remains a persistent problem in Australia.

The 2024 Reconciliation Barometer found a significant increase in racism against First Nations people. Antisemitism and Islamophobia have also been on the rise.

Many other migrant communities and their Australian-born descendants continue to face racial discrimination, abuse and systemic marginalisation.

And yet the true picture of racism in Australia is hard to determine, as a lot of racism goes unreported. Our soon to be published research reveals people often don't know how to come forward, are scared of negative consequences, or simply don't think anything would change if they did report it.

Unheard voices

The silencing of those who have experienced racism manifests in various ways, including the sceptical, at times hostile public reactions to those who speak out publicly.

But our research, funded by VicHealth and accepted for publication by the journal Ethnic and Racial Studies, analysed how inadequate formal reporting pathways can mean people don't come forward about their experiences.

We conducted a survey of more than 700 people, then focus groups with almost 160 people. In total, we examined the experiences of 859 Victorian adults from culturally or racially marginalised communities.

The vast majority of them – 76% of the survey respondents – had experienced racism in Australia, across many areas of life. These experiences happened at work, in shopping centres, on public transport and on the streets. Some also encountered racism in schools, healthcare, housing, online or when dealing with police.

But crucially, only 15.5% of them had ever reported any such incident to an organisation.

Unsurprisingly, one of the reasons why people do not report is that many are not aware of existing reporting options, for example through the federal or states' human rights commissions.

For 75.2% of survey respondents, not knowing where and how to report was a key barrier. The only place most people knew about was the police, which was often not seen as appropriate unless the incident involved physical violence.

Moreover, trust in an effective response by police was generally low. A Muslim woman in one of the focus groups said:

> *the biggest reason [for not reporting] is probably not knowing. The obvious is the police station, but then, well, many of us already feel that police won't do much. But what else is out there?*

High cost, low reward

An even bigger obstacle is that reporting racism was commonly considered high-cost, but low-reward. Most participants (83.2%) were deterred by the conviction that the process was taking too much time and effort.

As one Asian-Australian participant stated:

> *I imagine the reporting to be a long process. Do I want to go through the process, especially as a migrant. You ask yourself: is it life and death? If not, let me just get on with my day.*

Many highlighted concerns they would not be taken seriously (75.9%) or that reporting would have negative consequences for them or their children (72.8%). They were also concerned about how reporting could negatively affect their career, treatment at school or even their legal resident status.

An African-Australian man said:

> *You know you're gonna be a double victim. Let's say at your workplace, if you report racism, straight away […] you become a target.*

No accountability

These factors shape the discouraging perspective that reporting is a high-cost action.

But what makes it even worse is the very common conviction, expressed by 90.6% of survey respondents, that "nothing would change" even if they were to report, and that there was no accountability for racist behaviour.

A Somali-born mother, whose daughter was called a racist slur by her teacher, complained to the school principal, but "he didn't do anything". She said her kids and their friends "all agreed that no one would do anything about this". She said:

> *They have this belief that if they make a complaint, it will not go anywhere. They all said the same thing: If you go somewhere, no one will care.*

Another survey participant said reporting racism would have to be worth the effort:

> *We need to know that the mental and emotional sacrifice of reporting will be worth it, that it will result in an outcome. Why would I report racism if nothing will be done?*

'Don't rock the boat'

In addition, there are other psychological factors at play.

Of those surveyed, 70.1% explained they refrain from reporting because they don't want to "cause trouble". In the focus groups, participants often spoke about not wanting to "rock the boat" or refraining from "talking bad, talking about racism because they might hate us".

Similarly, others are so determined to "blend in" they feel they have to accept racism. A Chinese-Australian participant explained her community wouldn't complain because:

> *we want to, and try to, fit in. And we have come to accept a little bit of tough treatment.*

Even protecting the perpetrators of racism from harm was described by some as a reason for not reporting:

> *I thought by reporting I would hurt her [the perpetrator], and in our culture, we should not be hurting another person.*

What can be done?

Our research shows racism often goes undetected and unreported due to systemic and cultural barriers. As a result, injustice remains unchallenged and normalised.

But communities are finding alternative ways of speaking out against racism, often outside formal reporting channels.

Following our research, for example, three local community-led anti-racism support networks have been set up in parts of Victoria to complement the existing support and reporting system.

These networks provide trusted and culturally safe spaces and support to those who face racism. They have started to systematically document racism, working towards local evidence that can be used to raise awareness and inform targeted anti-racism actions in the future.

Networks like these could be introduced around the country to give people more options to come forward.

We won’t be able to properly address racism while those experiencing it think they won’t be listened to. We all need to ensure racist incidents are taken seriously, responded to promptly and that people are heard.

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One Big Idea Australian economy

Australia has engineers driving Uber – migrants' skills and qualifications need to be recognised now

Violet Roumeliotis

Countries such as Canada, Germany and the UK have already made reforms and are reaping the productivity benefits of fairer and faster skills recognition

- One Big Idea is a new series on how to transform Australia's economy ahead of Jim Chalmers' economic roundtable
- Get our breaking news email, free app or daily news podcast

Thu 14 Aug 2025 00.07 EDT

Composite for one big idea. The image shows a dentist, doctor and a graduation certificate. Composite: Guardian design

What is your one big idea?

It's time to reduce barriers so more qualified Australians who started their careers and education overseas can fill skill shortages crippling the economy. Making overseas skills and qualifications recognition faster, fairer and more affordable would enable more people to fully use their skills, unlocking immediate productivity gains. We can realise this productivity boost right now - no need to wait years for trickle-down effects from new infrastructure or large investments.

Our campaign, Activate Australia's Skills, has laid out four practical solutions to fix the skills recognition system.

First, we need a national governance system for skills recognition, with an ombudsman to make it fair and transparent. There is currently no single body responsible for ensuring the system works as it is intended.

Second, we must bridge the gap between our migration and employment recognition systems. It makes no sense that someone deemed skilled enough to migrate here to work in a specific profession is then blocked from working in that field due to disconnected recognition and licensing systems.

Third, we need to reduce cost and information barriers. It can cost tens of thousands of dollars for migrants to have their overseas-acquired skills and qualifications recognised here. And that's if you're actually able to navigate the complex system of 77 assessing authorities across 650 occupations. We need more financial support and clear, centralised information for applicants.

Finally, we must establish career gateways - local employment hubs with navigators - to help migrants get recognised. These hubs would be located in areas with high migrant populations. Unlike other services focused on unemployment, the hubs would address underemployment, supporting people working below their skill level to get into their professions again.

What are the benefits?

There are more than 620,000 permanent migrants in Australia unable to work to their full qualification level. Two-thirds of these workers came through Australia's skilled migration program, meaning we specifically selected them for their valuable skills. Instead, we've got engineers driving Ubers while those very professions face critical shortages.

Getting these workers back into their fields would benefit migrants themselves, along with the 90% of leaders who report that their businesses are experiencing skills shortages. It would also benefit everyday Australians by easing shortages such as the 10,000 childcare workers needed or 200 GP clinics that close every year.

There is also an economic incentive to the tune of $9bn additional GDP per year over the next 10 years if we better harnessed the skills of migrants already here.

What are the downsides?

The main concern people raise when they hear about reforming skills recognition is what it means for Australia's high standards. These reforms are not about lower standards. We're talking about addressing barriers that are unrelated to people's skills: unfair assessments, excessive fees and unaccountable licensing bodies that create unnecessary obstacles.

This will not reduce the quality of professional practice. In fact, making the system more efficient and transparent will help uphold standards.

How practical is it?

What sets these productivity reforms apart is that they're ready to go. They don't require years of negotiation or billions in spending. They require leadership, coordination and a commitment to fairness, but would deliver benefits quicker than just about any solution on the table.

How politically risky is it?

The government has called for bold ideas to boost productivity. This is one of them. It's simple, fair and already backed by more than 100 organisations across business, unions and civil society. It's time to activate Australia's skills for the benefit of all.

Other countries have already shown the way. Countries such as Canada, Germany, Sweden, and the UK have implemented similar reforms and are now reaping the productivity benefits from fairer and faster skills recognition.

• Violet Roumeliotis is the CEO of Settlement Services International, an organisation supporting people from diverse backgrounds to reach their potential in Australia

Most viewed

Australian doctors admit they give patients 'active placebos' — real drugs that won't help

By medical reporter **Sophie Scott** and Specialist Reporting Team's **Mary Lloyd**

Health

Sun 1 Dec 2019 at 6:41pm

A survey of 136 GPs across the country revealed most doctors prescribe placebos at least once a month. *(Supplied: University of Sydney)*

When going to the GP, most people expect to leave with medication to fix an illness — or at least a treatment plan to tackle it.

But Australian-first research reveals doctors are instead giving many patients placebos, ranging from water-based injections to unnecessary antibiotics.

A placebo treatment is one doctors know won't address the underlying

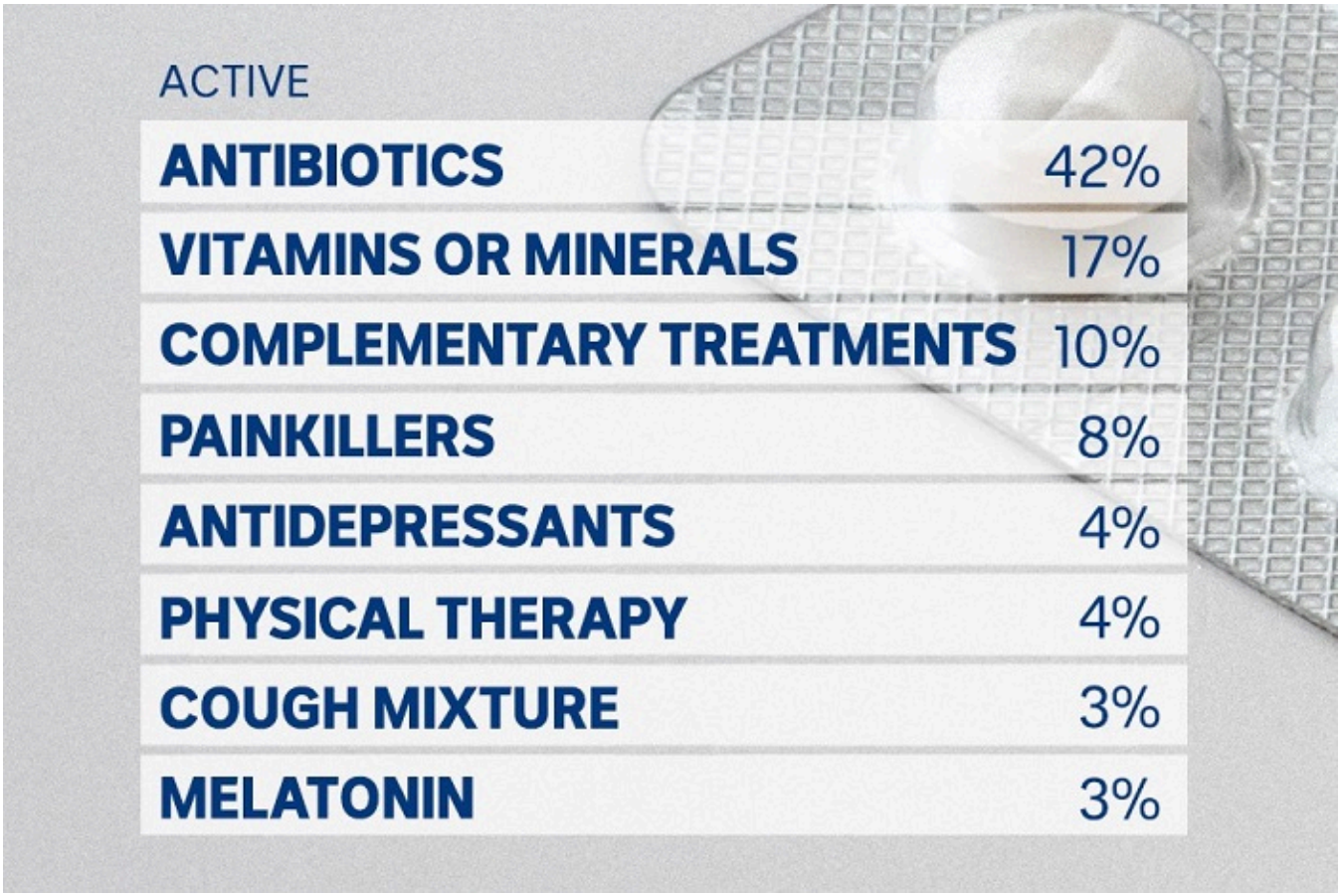
Key points:

condition but that may produce a positive psychological or physiological effect for some patients.

University of Sydney School of Psychology Associate Professor Ben Colagiuri said almost 80 per cent of Australian GPs reported giving patients an "active placebo".

"Many were prescribing antibiotics or antidepressants, which are genuine drugs, as a placebo," Professor Colagiuri said.

- 77 per cent of doctors reported giving 'active placebos' — drugs that are real but aren't used to address the underlying condition
- 39 per cent of doctors give 'inactive placebos' — fake drugs, like sugar pills
- GPs report using placebos because they believe they have genuine psychological benefits



Medications used for active placebo treatments. *(ABC News)*

In other words, many patients are being prescribed real medications — but these medications are not designed to treat the condition the patient presented with.

In the study of 136 GPs across Australia, 77 per cent admitted ever giving active medications such as antidepressants as a placebo and 40 per cent said they used them at least once a month.

A total of 39 per cent of doctors said they gave inactive placebos — like sugar pills.

The patients most likely to receive a placebo were those presenting with a viral infection, insomnia, pain, fatigue or depression.

"Doctors generally do not tell patients what they are getting is a placebo and genuinely think patients would benefit from it," Professor Colagiuri said.

Inactive placebo treatments used by GPs. *(ABC News)*

Why prescribe a placebo?

Despite their lack of medical efficacy, studies show placebos can actually help patients suffering from pain, nausea and high blood pressure.

They can offer real benefits, often because patients expect the treatment to work.

"We know if someone is given a painkiller and they expect pain relief, there are changes in the central nervous system," Professor Colagiuri said.

"The brain releases opioids which are natural painkillers and there is a measurable response to pain."

But experts stress that while placebo treatments might help symptoms of an illness, they won't cure a serious condition such as heart disease or asthma.

Placebo treatments have been proven to help treat patients suffering from pain and nausea. *(ABC News)*

What they can do, however, is to reassure patients their condition is being managed.

An example is offering melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate sleep cycles, to a patient complaining of insomnia, even though it is not clear whether it will help.

Dr Cris Beer, a GP on the Gold Coast, said doctors may offer a placebo to reassure patients and avoid giving them riskier medication.

"Meeting patient expectations for something they can hopefully use to help them settle their anxiety and be able to fall asleep is better than giving them nothing and letting them lie wide awake," she said.

In some instances, placebos can prevent doctors putting patients on stronger medications, such as sleeping tablets.

"Unfortunately, you then have the situation where a patient can become addicted to them and that's creating more problems to try and get them off," she said.

Too much pressure on GPs?

The study revealed 40 per cent of GPs suggested a placebo, because it was what patients expected.

In one instance, Dr Beer said she had been verbally abused by an aggressive patient when she would not offer him medicine for a cough she diagnosed as a viral infection.

In a survey of Australian doctors, Associate Professor Ben Colagiuri found more than one third had given patients inert placebos. *(Supplied: University of Sydney)*

"They've come to see you and so you feel in some way obligated by the pressure of meeting patient expectations for something at the end of the consult," she said.

More than half of doctors offered placebos because they believed they would deliver genuine benefits.

Dr Beer said antibiotics were one of the most commonly prescribed active placebos, particularly where patients had a viral illness.

The study found one in five GPs reported prescribing antibiotics for suspected viral infections.

Australian Medical Association vice-president Chris Moy said placebos could be appropriate in some cases.

"In exceptional circumstances where everything else has failed, and where there is no risk to the patient, you are not going to do any harm, a doctor may consider prescribing a placebo, and guess what if it works, the proof is in the pudding, it's been a success," Dr Moy said.

He said there was striking evidence of the therapeutic benefits of some placebos.

"The studies show somewhere [between] about 15 to 70 per cent of times giving a placebo may alleviate symptoms," he said.

Fewer than 200 GPs took part in the study, with the study authors cautioning that the findings may not be applicable to all GPs in Australia.

Posted Sun 1 Dec 2019 at 6:41pm, updated Mon 2 Dec 2019 at 9:19pm

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End of mission statement by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to Australia (12-20 December 2022) containing its preliminary findings and recommendations.

Canberra, 20 December 2022

1. The United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent thanks the Government of Australia for its invitation to visit the country and for its cooperation. We thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Home Affairs for organizing the visit.

2. The views expressed in this statement are of a preliminary nature. Our final report will be presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council in September 2023.

3. During the visit, the Working Group assessed the human rights situation of Africans and people of African descent in Australia, and gathered information on the forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance they face. The Working Group studied measures and mechanisms to prevent systemic racial discrimination and to protect victims of racism, as well as responses to multiple forms of discrimination.

4. As part of its fact-finding mission, the Working Group visited Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. It met with senior officials of the Australian Commonwealth Government (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Home Affairs, Attorney General's Department, Department of Education, Department of Health and Aged Care, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It also met with representatives of State Government, officials from the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, representatives of Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, officials of the Queensland Government, the Anti-Discrimination NSW, as well as representatives of the Australian Boarder Force, the Australian Federal Police and law enforcement in Brisbane and Canberra. It also visited the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre in Sydney.

5. The Working Group met with civil society representatives of African descent from Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Perth and Adelaide. We thank civil society, human rights defenders, lawyers and academics as well as African Australians and people of African descent across Australia, including families of affected African Australian communities and individuals who shared their experiences and written submissions with the Working Group. We welcome their efforts to promote and protect the human rights of people of African descent in Australia.

6. The Working Group welcomes the good practices and positive steps taken to guarantee the human rights of people of African descent in Australia including the following:

   a) The establishment of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights in 2012;
   b) The promulgation of the Human Rights Act, 2004, by the Australian Capital Territory;
   c) The Government's initiatives to support the mental health of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations and communities in Australia;

   d) Initiatives taken among certain states such as the Victorian African Communities Action Plan, the development of Victoria's anti-racism strategy, the Settlement Engagement Transition Supports (SETS);
   e) the intended shift of the Gender Equality Branch to an intersectional approach, the qualification equivalence framework in Victoria, and
   f) the support offered to organisations, alliances, community leaders and communities of African descent to ensure the human rights of their constituencies.

   g) The work of the Australian Human Rights Commission especially the development of the National Anti-Racism Framework, the State Commissions and the Ombudsman to protect the human rights of people of African descent and other communities that face racial discrimination.

7. Despite the positive measures referred to above, the Working Group is concerned about the prevalence of racial discrimination and the human rights situation of Africans and people of African descent in Australia. Although with limited recognition, Africans and people of African descent form a significant part of Australia's human resource capital since the arrival of 12 Africans and people of African descent on the First Fleet, and they contribute themselves, their knowledge, skills and culture to the society as citizens, migrants, academics, students and

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EDUCATION

Australia's forgotten education problem

by Amy Haywood

12.02.2024 NEWS

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Published in EducationHQ, 12 February 2024

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According to the latest OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, 43 per cent of 15-year-old students in Australia are not proficient in reading, and there is a cavernous gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students – 60 per cent of disadvantaged students aren't proficient, compared with 25 per cent of their more advantaged peers.

These students will find it very difficult to engage in their high school education, driving an even bigger wedge between poor readers and strong readers.

Secondary schooling assumes students have already mastered decoding, developed strong comprehension skills, and built a large vocabulary across subjects. Without these skills, students can flounder.

I taught secondary English and saw first-hand the damaging effect not being able to read well can have on students' lives. For students who haven't mastered decoding or developed sufficient fluency, it is demoralising to sit in lesson after lesson unable to read what is in front of them.

Secondary students have not built up sufficient vocabulary and background knowledge often struggle to grasp the content of a lesson. Try explaining – as I have – a nuanced concept such as 'communism' to a Year 11 student who does not understand the meaning of words or phrases like 'social class', 'capitalism', and 'property'.

There's too much new knowledge to take in and they can quickly become overwhelmed.

The sad truth is these students are the most likely to become disengaged and disruptive in class, drop out of school, and suffer from poor mental health. Teachers see the impact this has on students every day. But governments largely overlook it – the struggles of these students are the forgotten problem in Australia's education system.

Secondary school teachers are being asked to do an impossible job, because while the learning gaps are widest in high school, the vast majority of secondary teachers do not have the training to teach the fundamental skills of

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reading. And individual secondary teachers simply don't have the time to give struggling teenagers the intensive support they need to catch up to their classmates.

But the good news is we can tackle Australia's reading problem. The evidence is clear that a whole-school approach to monitoring and catching-up students works best. I've seen schools implement this approach and make a real difference to students' lives.

Parafield Gardens High School – a large government secondary school in northern Adelaide that serves a low socio-economic community – is one of these schools.

Many students who join Parafield High need help with reading. The school has set up a process to screen the reading proficiency of all new students; in 2022 this program revealed about half of its 180 Year 7 students were identified as 'at risk'.

Of these, about one in three had a decoding age of younger than 10. Once screened, the school builds a reader profile of each 'at risk' student and allocates them appropriate support or refers them on for specialist assessment.

One type of support is the school's 'Reading Acceleration Program' (RAP). About 70 Year 7 and 8 students with poor decoding ability attend 60-minute RAP lessons twice a week, instead of studying an additional language.

Teaching is explicit and intensive. Teachers follow a detailed phonics sequence lesson-by-lesson, and classes have one teacher or teaching assistant for every five students, to build strong relationships, reduce disruption and provide lots of feedback.

The results are impressive. In 2022, RAP students gained on average two-and-a-quarter years in decoding ability over just three-and-a-half terms.

Establishing RAP was not easy. The principal had to fund the program, re-organise the timetable, hire a full-time speech pathologist, pay for 14 staff to complete a four-day training course, and buy additional curriculum materials.

This was only possible because of a clear decision to prioritise building reading proficiency for struggling students over other potential school projects and activities.

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The sort of approach taken by Parafield Gardens High works, but it's not happening in enough Australian schools.

In a 2022 survey of nearly 400 secondary teachers and school leaders across Australia, by the Australian Education Research Organisation, about a quarter of teachers and school leaders said they did not, or only sometimes, identified which students were struggling and needed support. And only about half said their school consistently provided catch-up support to students identified as struggling with reading.

This is deeply concerning. Without catch-up support, these students are very unlikely to get back on track.

Here's what our state and territory governments should do to make sure fewer Australian students continue to fall through the cracks.

First, governments should publicly commit to ensuring that at least 90 per cent of Australian students learn to read proficiently at school, up from 68 per cent across primary and secondary schools as revealed by NAPLAN assessments in 2023.

Second, they should require schools to screen all students in the transition to secondary school, to identify students who may not have established strong foundational reading skills in primary school.

Third, governments should give schools and teachers specific, practical guidelines on how best to help these students to catch-up, including recommended reading intervention programs and assessment schedules.

Fourth, governments should audit existing reading intervention programs and assessments available to secondary students, and invest in new programs or assessments where needed.

Fifth, they should ensure secondary teachers have the training they need to build students' reading skills. This should include developing new quality-assured micro-credentials, creating literacy instructional specialists in every secondary school, and establishing demonstration schools to spread best practice across secondary schools.

And sixth, governments should beef-up school reviews. At present, too many reviews are a 'tick and flick' exercise. In future, they should be conducted by independent reviewers at least every four years and include an examination of a school's performance on helping struggling students to catch-up.

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This won't be easy. It will take long-term commitment from governments. But, as a literacy leader at Parafields Garden High told me: 'It is hard, but not impossible. Where there's a will, there's a way – and the stakes are too high not to do it.'

Amy Haywood

EDUCATION DEPUTY PROGRAM DIRECTOR

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Amy Haywood is the Deputy Program Director of Grattan Institute's Education Program. Amy has a background as an educator and brings this practical experience to her work as an education policy researcher.

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We acknowledge and celebrate the First Nations people on whose traditional lands we meet and work, and whose cultures are among the oldest in human history.

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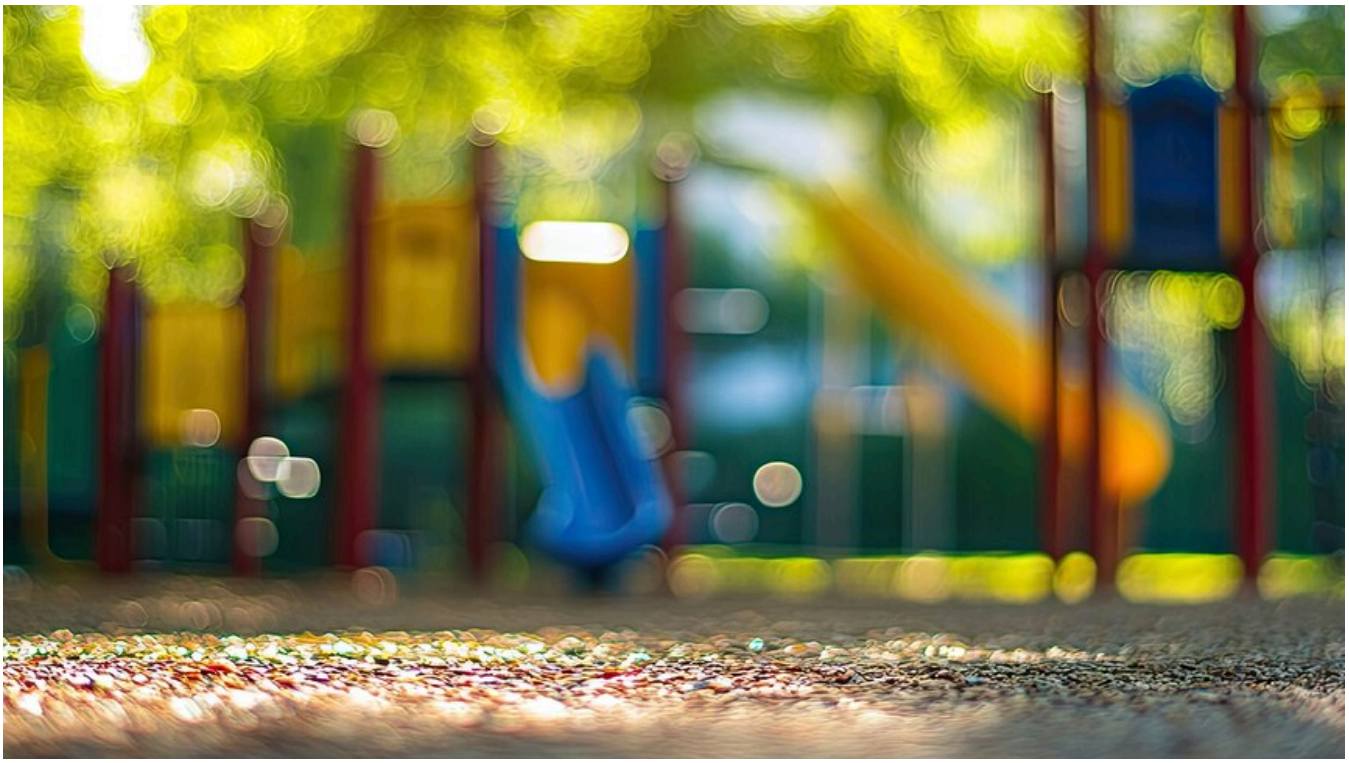
Parents call for accountability shift as schools advise bullying victims to 'change behaviour'

By Madeleine Rojahn

Bullying

Tue 9 Sep 2025 at 7:47pm



A "zero tolerance to harmful behaviours" should be the norm, a children's wellbeing expert says. *(Supplied: Adobe)*

In short:

Parents of children who are bullied at school say too often the victim is expected to modify their behaviour, rather than the school managing the students causing harm.

Australia's children's commissioner has said in cases of bullying, "responsibility should not sit with the victim to fix this or to remove themselves".

What's next?

A federal review aimed at addressing high bullying rates in Australia, by devising a national response standard, is set to finalise its work next month.

After a good day at school, nine-year-old Sophie* would hug and thank her primary school teacher.

But those actions were seen as "babyish" by her peers, and Sophie would frequently come home crying due to bullying.

Parents call for bullying protections

At one point, a hurtful slideshow was made about Sophie and circulated around a group.

Her mother, Jennifer*, said she reported incidents to teachers, the vice principal and principal on multiple occasions, pointing out to authorities the behaviour presented "clear breaches" of the school's policies and codes of conduct.

While this led to those students responsible being told to "reflect", Jennifer said the school's responses were largely "disappointing".

Sophie* would hold and read encouraging quotes after a bad day of bullying. *(Supplied)*

The behaviour didn't stop, and instead, Jennifer said the school suggested Sophie's behaviour should change.

> **"[The school] said maybe we should talk to her about not doing those things, because that makes her more of a target," Jennifer said.**

Jennifer said Sophie's approach of saying to the bullies that she would "tell the teachers on them if they didn't stop" was also deemed "aggravating" by the school, and Jennifer said the school suggested Sophie find a "secret" way to tell the teacher.

"There needs to be a shift in accountability," Jennifer said.

If you or anyone you know needs help:

"Why are we shaming her? Shouldn't the shame be on the kids behaving really badly? There's a clear misalignment of values."

Months went on, and Sophie began refusing to attend school. When the situation didn't improve, Jennifer resorted to changing her daughter's school.

- Lifeline (24-hour Crisis Line): 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800
- MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636
- Headspace: 1800 650 890
- ReachOut: au.reachout.com

Sophie and Jennifer's story is among a number from families who wrote to the ABC after hearing Lucy's* story — expressing frustration at school responses that called on victims to change their behaviour, not the bullies.

"[In workplaces] there's whole departments you can go to, and you can seek that support, and we really advocate that you don't get to treat people like that in any setting," Jennifer said.

> **"But yet within our school system, we seem to be teaching them something completely different.**

"We live in a society where there are rules and regulations that govern all of us.

"Why are these not applied? Because [school is] the perfect opportunity where they should be applied."

Sophie's mum felt her daughter was being shamed for being "different". *(ABC News: Rebecca Carmody)*

Zero-tolerance approach needed

National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds said a lack of school support can increase harm for all, but especially for victims.

> **"The responsibility should not sit with the victim to fix this or to remove themselves," Ms Hollonds said.**

Ms Hollonds said more harm could result from inadequate support structures. *(AAP: Bianca De Marchi)*

"There should be accountability for the child, who has caused the harm, but what that accountability is will have to be assessed in a case-by-case basis."

"It is extremely difficult when we're talking about children harming other children," she noted.

She said schools needed to set standards and take a "zero tolerance to harmful behaviours".

"Schools should be required to create a culture that promotes respect among students and teachers — [One that] promotes dignity and empathy and compassion, and which recognises the harmful effects if anti-social behaviours are allowed to proliferate."

Students have their say for review

A federal review with a scope to devise a national standard to address bullying has heard from students who shared their views with child-wellbeing experts.

The review received more than 1,700 online submissions, with more than 110 consultations with parents, students, education professionals and other stakeholders undertaken.

The anti-bullying rapid review commissioned by the Department of Education is set to finalise its work next month.

One of the students said the following:

> "Sometimes bullies don't fully understand the harm they're causing. Encouraging empathy can shift their perspective.
>
> "Ask questions like, 'How would you feel if someone said that to you?' or suggest they think about the other person's feelings.
>
> "A respectful, kind and inclusive environment makes bullying less likely to happen in the first place.
>
> "Set group norms, be a role model, include others and celebrate differences. One positive leader can inspire others."

Another student said:

> "As a justice leader at my school, I want change and change that has a lasting impact for every one of us for a long time to come.
>
> "Too often bullying is dismissed as 'oh, they're just being kids' or as 'they're just being silly'.
>
> "This can all lead to students not wanting to come to school; leading into students missing the education that they deserve [and] becoming isolated from peers, family and friends — and even worse self-harm and suicide.

> "As someone who has experience bullying throughout my schooling, I want change and I want it now."

Review co-chairs psychologist Charlotte Keating and suicide-prevention researcher Jo Robinson said they had passed the students' comments on to federal Education Minister Jason Clare.

The report's final recommendations are expected on October 17.

Dr Charlotte Keating says parents are calling for transparency. *(ABC News: Billy Cooper)*

"What we tend to hear is when schools manage to balance policies, procedures and a warm school environment, that tends to go very well," Dr Keating said.

"When students — they've told us — [say] their voice is heard, that can be very important, and when they are responded to."

"Parents clearly want to feel there is transparency and communication when something is reported. And teachers dearly want to feel equipped to be able to respond in a way that can be helpful."

As well as identifying successful and unsuccessful anti-bullying measures, the review will devise a national standard for policies and procedures.

A lack of consistency in the approach to bullying by schools was identified as a reason for why the practice had proliferated in Australian schools.

** Names have been changed to protect privacy*

Posted Tue 9 Sep 2025 at 7:47pm, updated Tue 9 Sep 2025 at 9:37pm

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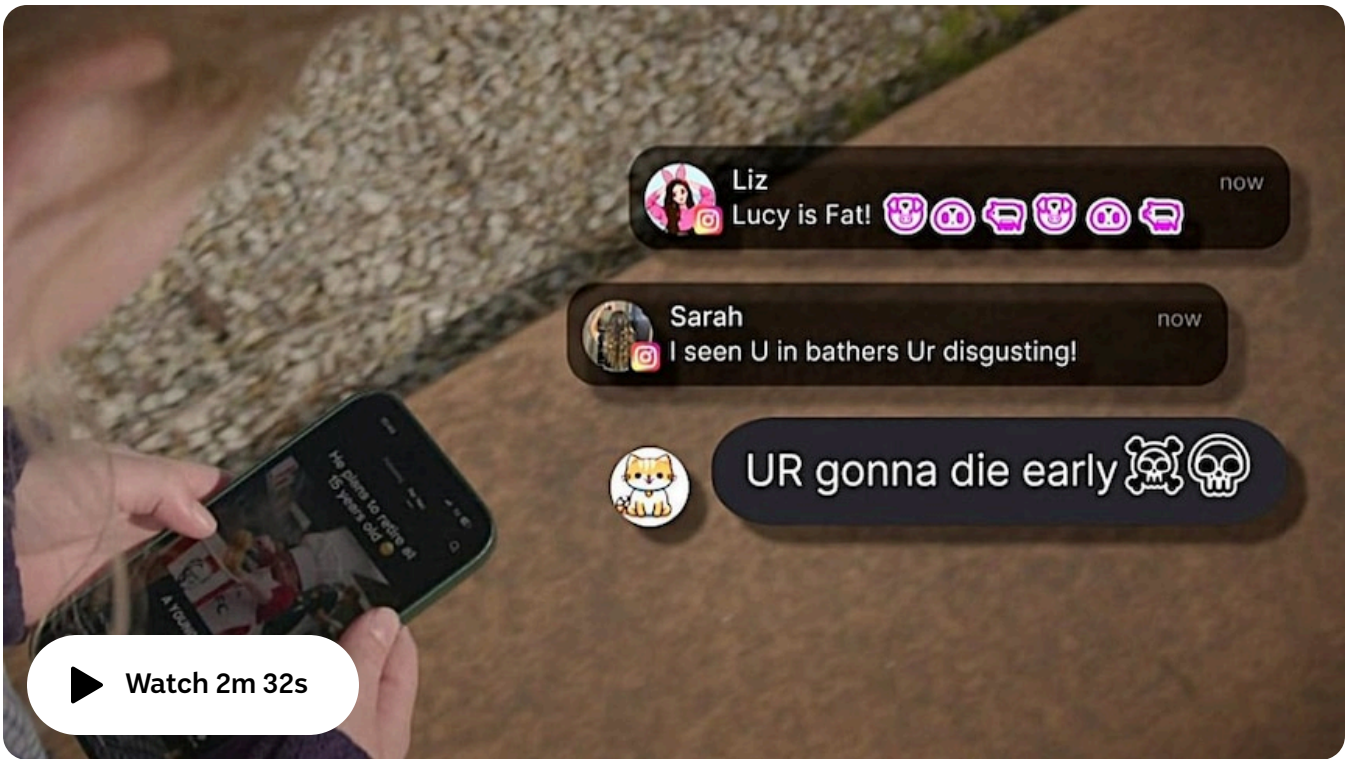
Bullied 10yo's parents tried to protect her, but at this school, they couldn't

By Madeleine Rojahn

Children's Health

Wed 3 Sep 2025 at 7:09pm



Lucy even wrote list of "reasons I need to leave" her school.

In short:

A 10-year-old girl wrote a note about being bullied in primary school, saying "my teacher does nothing to help me".

Australia has the second-highest rate of bullying out of a study of 24 countries, and Tasmania has the worst rate out of all states and territories.

What's next?

The parents of the girl have moved her to a new school where she's doing better, but have urged schools to take more action.

Lucy* was in grade 2, age eight, when the peer bullying began.

At the "subtle end" of the abuse was exclusion in the playground.

At the extreme end was body shaming and "deep-cutting comments".

And when the Tasmanian student got home from school, there was still no refuge.

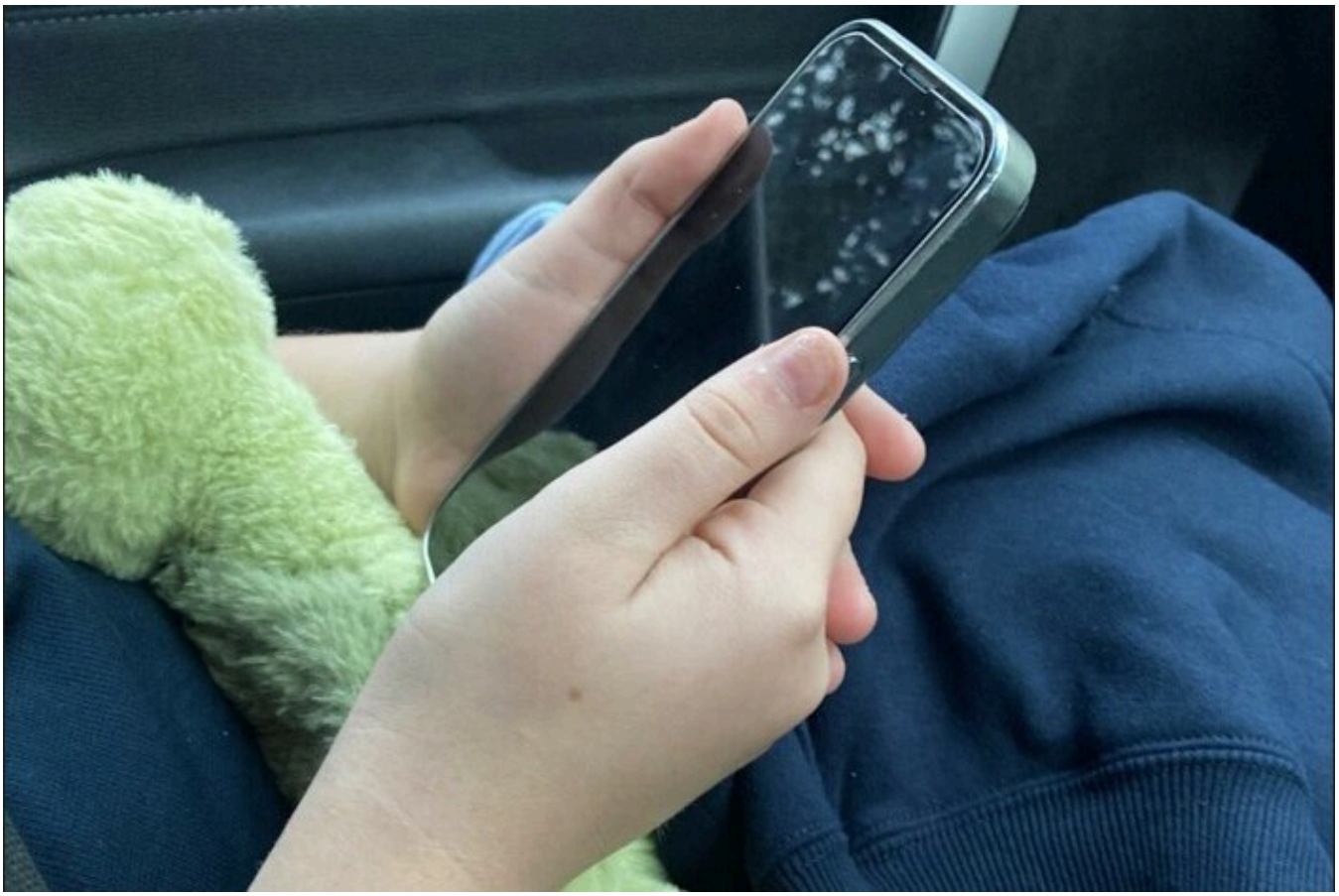
> **"Social media was used as a tool to call her things like 'fat', 'you're going to die early', 'I've seen you in bathers and you're disgusting,'" Lucy's mother Bree* said.**

She said her daughter, now a socially insecure 10-year-old with body-image issues, started to "second-guess" things she once enjoyed.

Lucy even wrote a plea in a notebook her mother kept on the kitchen bench.

> Reasons I need to leave [school name]
>
> 1. [Bully's name] bc [because] she bullies me
> 2. Too much drama because: [bully's name])
> 3. My teacher does nothing to help me getting bullied
> 4. Everyone stops whispering when I go by
> 5. I get involved in drama (Help help help)
> 6. I want to be [out of] my high school already
> 7. I'm having trouble fitting in

The situation culminated in Lucy saying she wanted to end her life, her mother said.



Lucy holds a soft toy while looking at a phone on the trip to school. *(Supplied)*

Mother told school's 'hands are tied'

Bree said she and her husband had tried to get the school to address the problem, such as by holding discussions with the parents of the students bullying their daughter.

While a teacher was initially responsive to the bullying concerns, the couple felt not enough was done.

In the classroom, Lucy's seat was changed, and she was told to remove herself from incidents and report them.

Her parents took her off social media.

Aside from that, without the other parents coming to the table, Bree said the school told her "that their hands are tied".

"Our daughter was at a point where she just didn't want to go to school, she would really melt down of a morning," Bree said.

> **"She was scared and worried about the things that were being said."**

Lucy would hold her mum's hand on the way to school each day for reassurance. *(Supplied)*

"My teacher does nothing to help me getting bullied," Lucy wrote. *(ABC News: Maren Preuss)*

Parents pull Lucy out of the school

Lucy missed multiple school days this year. For each, Bree used the school's reporting system to notify that it was due to anxiety from bullying.

When there was no response, she eventually requested an appointment with the vice-principal.

"She [the vice-principal] pulled the data and realised that we had been reporting through that forum, instances of bullying, and the impact that was happening on our daughter," Bree said.

"There was no trigger in place to notify the teacher or the vice-principal that our daughter was feeling this way as a result of bullying in the school."

Lucy would face exclusion in the playground. *(Pixabay, Hucklebarry)*

When things still did not improve, Bree said her family was becoming increasingly "distressed" — and resorted to pulling Lucy out of the school.

"We could have kept sending her back and trying to instil those values of resilience and respect for the fact there are rules and, you know, if we follow the rules then hopefully something good will come out of that," Bree said.

> **"However, we were at the point where we thought that her mental health was more important and also, our family as well.**

"It's quite distressing to see a little girl upset about things like that."

What options do schools have?

Psychologist Charlotte Keating is co-chairing a federal review, hoping, among other things, to devise a national standard to addressing bullying.

"It would provide, essentially, children and families with greater confidence that regardless of where a child attends school, any experience of bullying will be addressed," Dr Keating said.

Federal Education Minister Jason Clare said state and territory education ministers would meet to hear recommendations of the review on October 17.

The federal review draws upon states' and territories' own bullying inquiries. But Tasmania's was cut short when an early state election was called.

Tasmanian Education Minister Jo Palmer said the government was "absolutely supportive" of the inquiry being reinstated.

"Our government was fully engaged with the inquiry during the hearings phase and I was very keen to see its findings and recommendations."

Charlotte Keating is co-chairing the federal Anti-Bullying Rapid Review. *(ABC News: Billy Cooper)*

Australian teenagers face the second-highest rates of bullying out of 24 countries studied by the Australian Council for Educational Research. Tasmania reported higher rates of bullying behaviours than the rest of Australia.

> Top 10 OECD nations with greatest exposure to bullying:
>
> 1. Latvia
> 2. **Australia**
> 3. New Zealand
> 4. United Kingdom
> 5. Denmark
> 6. Estonia
> 7. Czech Republic
> 8. Singapore
> 9. Macao (China)

10. Canada

The five OECD nations with lowest exposure to bullying:

1. South Korea
2. Chinese Taipei
3. Japan
4. Netherlands
5. Hong Kong (China)

Australian state and territory ranking on exposure to bullying, highest to lowest:

1. Tasmania
2. Queensland
3. Western Australia
4. Northern Territory
5. South Australia
6. Australian Capital Territory
7. New South Wales
8. Victoria

Source: ACER - Program for International Student Assessment 2022

A 2023 report found there were gaps in evidence regarding effective policies to improve student wellbeing, as well as inconsistencies in wellbeing measures across Australian schools.

In Tasmania, all schools are required to have policies and procedures covering bullying, complaint management, and behaviour management to encourage "acceptable behaviour".

If you or anyone you know needs help:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467

But policies differ depending on whether schools are government-run, independent or Catholic.

One key consistency is that schools may notify the state's regulator, the Office of Education Registrar (OER), which may provide a formal process called "compulsory conciliation conferencing" — in cases where a child is not attending school, for example, due to bullying.

The process is used once the school's own policy has been exhausted or earlier in certain cases.

- Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636
- Headspace on 1800 650 890
- ReachOut at au.reachout.com
- Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) on 1800 008 774
- Rural Alive and Well on 1300 4357 6283
- Rural Health Connect on 0427 692 377

The OER explained this was a "restorative" approach that had powers to bring parents or guardians, school representatives and support people together with an independent conciliator.

Road to recovery

After a few weeks at a new school, Bree said Lucy's "got a smile back on her face".

> **"It's great, but I think it [the bullying] going to have a long-term impact, it's going to be a long road," she said.**

But the family wants more done to help other kids.

"I have heard my daughter say, 'I want to die'. You know, 'I want to kill myself.'"

Listen 3m 1s

"So, unless the government and the school associations want more little people to fall victim to this, something has to be done."

**Names have been changed for privacy.*

Kids Helpline data show bullying rates are getting worse

Posted Wed 3 Sep 2025 at 7:09pm, updated Wed 3 Sep 2025 at 9:53pm

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Australian immigration and asylum

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Migrant groups urge reform of Australia's 'broken' skills recognition process

Streamlining system would get more people into suitable jobs and ease labour supply issues, advocates say

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A new report is calling for reform to get more migrants into suitable jobs to ease labour supply issues as 286 occupations face shortages. Photograph: Dave Hunt/AAP

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Mohammad Zubair Harooni has been trying and failing to get a job in his field since he arrived in Australia nearly 18 months ago.

While Harooni has a glittering CV, with more than 20 years of experience in public health in Afghanistan, including work as a UN program specialist in HIV, his biggest obstacle has been his status as a recent migrant.

He is one of the many who have struggled to have their qualifications recognised in Australia, with one in four migrants working beneath their skill level.

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"I have applied for several positions within the health sector and it has been rejection after rejection," says Harooni, a father of four.

"It's been really frustrating because my qualifications have not been considered since my arrival. Not even my master's degree, which was actually completed in Australia, has made a difference."

Only 33% of permanent arrivals in Australia have had their post-school qualifications recognised, even as Australia faces a crippling national skills shortage, with approximately 350,000 skilled job vacancies across the country.

It can be an arduous task to get overseas qualifications recognised in Australia. The Productivity Commission in 2006 described it as "complex, time-consuming and bureaucratic" process.

And it has forced Harooni to turn to other options, including taking an entry-level role at Transport NSW, a job he says he is happy for but doesn't reflect what he can do.

"I'm really thankful for my job, but within myself I am not feeling happy that I am not working in my profession, which is what I have dedicated most of my life to," he says.

"It has affected all parts of my life. I've had no income for the last year. I couldn't rent a house, and the stress was having a negative impact on my health. So I just had to take any role."

A new report from a consortium of migrant advocacy and service groups is calling for reform to get more migrants into suitable jobs that will ease labour supply issues as 286 occupations face shortages.

The consortium - comprising Settlement Services International, The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), Amnesty International, Settlement Council of Australia and Community Corporate - proposes five

solutions. These include fixing the “broken” skills and qualifications recognition system, strengthening protections for migrant workers, reviewing the right to work for people on temporary visas, building partnerships between public and private sectors, and reforming English language requirements.

Violet Roumeliotis, the CEO of Settlement Services International, said the proposed reforms would be a “win-win-win” for migrants, employers and the economy.

“These ideas could have a significant impact on their lives. We have so many cases of doctors or dentists or lawyers who are Uber drivers because they need the money and can’t get their qualifications recognised,” Roumeliotis said.

“They become de-skilled, they become demoralised and lose motivation, it can be a real struggle for them and their families, particularly when they know they can work in a role they are skilled in and can be paid well.”

She said the current system for recognising overseas qualifications was a “cumbersome and confusing process” and as a result only a third of permanent arrivals get through it.

“It’s around 34 different authorities that govern around 400 professions.”

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Roumeliotis said there are also often cultural barriers to employment and qualification recognition, such as racism.

“We’ve got recruiters who tell us there is, unfortunately, a racist element here,” she said.

“There are some who insist they don’t want to hire people from particular backgrounds, or people with names they can’t pronounce. It’s a toxic attitude.”

Mohan Gunasekara, the acting CEO at Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) said the cost of qualification recognition should also be reformed.

“It can cost thousands of dollars to have some skills assessed, with some occupations requiring multiple tests that can multiply the cost,” Gunasekara said.

“And it acts as a disincentive - it leaves people behind.”

The federal government, ismeanwhile, is moving to increase Australia’s humanitarian resettlement program for 2023-24, in keeping with its election promise.

The 2022-23 program has 17,875 places including 1,400 places for the community support Program and 4,125 additional places for Afghan nationals.

The government has also announced it is on track to convert the majority of people on temporary protection visas to permanent visas, with approximately 3,000 resolution of status (ROS) visas granted so far.

“We’re delivering a humanitarian program that considers a refugee’s entire resettlement journey, ensuring refugees can rebuild their lives with certainty and participate fully in Australian society,” immigration minister Andrew Giles said.

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